

Robert O. Anderson, Oil Executive, Dies at 90

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Robert O. Anderson, an oilman whose Stetson-size accomplishments included building Atlantic Richfield into an industry giant; discovering oil in Alaska; becoming America's largest rancher, and giving generously to environmental causes, died on Sunday at his home in Roswell, N.M. He was 90.



Associated Press, 1976

Robert O. Anderson

The cause was complications of a fall, his son Phelps Anderson said.

It was Mr. Anderson's insistence on drilling one more exploratory well on the North Slope in 1967 — after a succession of failures — that led to the discovery of what is still the largest oil field yet found in North America; it has produced billions of barrels of crude and accounts for a fifth of domestic oil production.

"It was like winning the Irish Sweepstakes, and the odds were about the same," Mr. Anderson said in an interview with Forbes in 1993.

He told The Los Angeles Times in 1989, "There's no question that if we hadn't made a discovery, it would have been the last well drilled on the North Slope for a good many years."

Mr. Anderson also led the seven-company effort to develop the Alaskan oil pipeline in 1974. In 1982, he negotiated the first American offshore drilling operation in China.

Even two decades after his retirement and even after Atlantic Richfield was bought by BP seven years ago, Mr. Anderson stood out as perceptive, unpredictable and outspoken.

He was an oilman who warned of global warming caused by fossil-fuel consumption in the 1980s, and more than once advocated higher taxes on his industry. He rescued two flailing publications, The Observer, a British newspaper, in 1977, and Harper's magazine in 1980.

He was also a Reagan Republican who held many top nonelected posts in the Republican Party and favored nuclear power and a smaller federal government. Despite his large environmental philanthropy, he was once doused with a can of motor oil by an opponent of the Alaskan pipeline.